

**Natasha M. Pierre, JD, MSW**  
**Acting State Victim Advocate**  
**Before the Executive & Legislative Nominations Committee**  
**February 5, 2015**

Good morning Senators Duff, Looney and Kane, Representatives Janowski, Vargas and Buck-Taylor, and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. Thank you for your consideration of my nomination to be the State's Victim Advocate.

I believe that to have a fulfilled life, I must give back to my community and society as a whole. That is how I live my life every day and something I am trying to show my daughter, who is with me here today, as I raise her. My commitment to advancing equity for everyone, including victims of crime, through counseling and direct services, community organizing, and legal and public policy advocacy has guided my career choices.

The advocacy root took hold early on as an undergraduate at the University of Connecticut, where I volunteered to advocate for victims of crime as a Rape Education Program Facilitator in the Women's Center, and as a Certified Counselor and Legal Advocate at Hartford Interval House. While seeking a dual degree in law and social work, I professionally advocated as Program Coordinator for a mother-daughter drug education and prevention program, and as a certified legal intern at the University of Connecticut Civil Rights Clinic.

I then went on to practice as a Staff Attorney at Western Massachusetts Legal Services and Connecticut Legal Services. I represented low-income clients in housing matters, and victims of domestic violence in family and public benefits matters. In addition to representing clients in court, I regularly intervened on behalf of clients before state agencies, visited shelters and community organizations to counsel potential clients, and engaged the community through outreach and education programming.

And finally to fulfill my advocacy purpose on a policy level, I worked as the Policy & Legislative Director at the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) for 14 years. I developed expertise on a number of issues and strategies to address economic security, health and safety, and the elimination of gender and racial discrimination. I worked to ensure that state laws, policies, and delivery of services benefit Connecticut women through legislation and public policies, statutorily mandated commissions, state agency programming, community organizations and coalitions, and through working relationships with victim advocacy organizations. I also acted as the staff attorney on litigation matters, such as freedom of information requests, amicus briefs, and the certificate of need process for hospital mergers.

I have been the Acting State Victim Advocate since December 26, 2014, and believe my combined legal, legislative, and social work experience provides me the opportunity to see crime victims from several angles. Although crime victims have a constitutional right to be engaged in the criminal process, there are still gaps in notification and enforcement of such rights. From watching television, most people can recite the Miranda warning given to criminal defendants, however many are not aware of crime victims' rights. In the time that I have been at the Office of the Victim Advocate, I have seen how informing and guiding crime victims through the criminal court process make an impact on the protections offered to the victims.

I have never wavered from my commitment to advocate for individuals to have the tools they need to rebuild and sustain their lives in difficult and challenging situations, and I am confident that I will continue to do so as the State Victim Advocate. Thank you again for considering my nomination. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.